

Rare Animals of Louisiana



Ornate Box Turtle

Terrapene ornata

Rarity Rank: S1/G5

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare		secure



Identification:

- 4 to 6 inches in total length
- Domed carapace with flat top, smooth edges, patterned with wide, yellow stripes radiating outwards
- The plastron has a divided gular scute, with a hinge between abdominal and pectoral scutes, thus forming two movable lobes capable of enclosing the entire body within the shell
- The plastron is a dark brown with a pattern of yellow lines
- Tail is short and each hind foot has four claws
- Males have red iris and females have yellow or brown iris

Taxonomic comments:

The subspecies found in Louisiana is *Terrapene ornata ornata*

Habitat:

- Open areas dominated by grasses and brushy vegetation such as prairies, grasslands, and sandy plains
- Occasionally found in forests

Food habits:

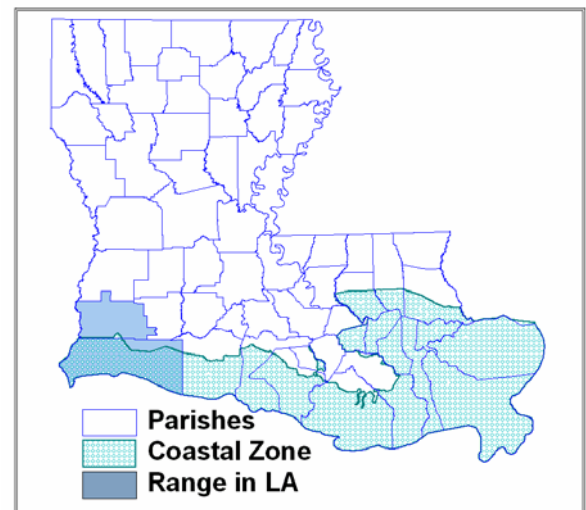
Beetles, caterpillars, grasshoppers, some carrion and berries as available

Range:

Found throughout Midwestern states including Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, southward through Texas and the eastern edge of Louisiana to the Gulf Coast

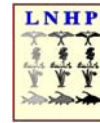
Reproduction:

- Males are mature at 7 years and females mature at 8 years of age
- These turtles typically mate in early spring
- Between May and July females dig nests in which to bury their eggs at dusk in open, dry areas
- Females dig a hole and bury the eggs (2 to 8 eggs), the young dig themselves out in October, after hatching



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

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Threats:

- Individuals are being collected for the pet trade in the U.S. and exported to other countries
- Mortality caused by habitat destruction, pesticides, and vehicular and lawn mower collisions

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Prevent conversion of existing grassland habitat to other land uses
- Use of growing season prescribed fire (April to June) at a frequency of every 1 to 2 years
- Remove any invasive plant species with use of spot herbicides or mechanical means
- Prohibit livestock overgrazing

LA River Basins:

Mermentau, Calcasieu, Sabine

References:

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- Dundee, H. A., and D. A. Rossman. 1989. The Amphibians and Reptiles of Louisiana. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Ernst, C.H., J.E. Lovich, and R.W. Barbour. 1994. Turtles of the United States. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C.
- Wilson, L. A. 1995. Land Manager's Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of the South. Nature Conservancy, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.